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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

AD-A231 042

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2b DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE		5 MONITORING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S) Technical Report No. 29	
4 PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S) IBM Research Report RJ 7875		5 MONITORING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S) Technical Report No. 29	
6a NAME OF PERFORMING ORGANIZATION IBM Research Division Almaden Research Center	6b OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable)	7a NAME OF MONITORING ORGANIZATION Office of Naval Research	
6c ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) 650 Harry Road San Jose, CA 95120-6099		7b ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) Chemistry Division Code 1113 Arlington, VA 22217	
8a NAME OF FUNDING/SPONSORING ORGANIZATION Office of Naval Research	8b OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable)	9 PROCUREMENT INSTRUMENT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER N00014-84-C-0708, 4131022	
8c ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) Chemistry Division, Code 1113 Arlington, VA 22217		10 SOURCE OF FUNDING NUMBERS PROGRAM ELEMENT NO PROJECT NO TASK NO WORK UNIT ACCESSION NO	
11 TITLE (Include Security Classification) Comment on "Single Pentacene Molecules Detected by Fluorescence Excitation in a p-Terphenyl Crystal"			
12 PERSONAL AUTHOR(S) W. E. Moerner and W. P. Ambrose			
13a TYPE OF REPORT interim technical	13b TIME COVERED FROM TO	14 DATE OF REPORT (Year, Month, Day) 1990, 12, 10	15 PAGE COUNT 7
16 SUPPLEMENTARY NOTATION			
17 COSATI CODES FIELD GROUP SUB-GROUP		18 SUBJECT TERMS (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number) single molecule detection, optical linewidth, spectral hole-burning, spectral diffusion	
19 ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number) Using highly efficient Fluorescence excitation spectroscopy of individual pentacene molecular impurities in p-terphenyl crystals, we have observed that some pentacene defects exhibit spontaneous spectral jumps in their resonance frequency at 1.5 K, with a jump rate independent of laser power. In addition, the low-power limiting linewidth for single pentacene absorbers reaches the lifetime limit of 7.8 MHz at 1.5 K.			
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22a NAME OF RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL Dr. W.E. Moerner		22b TELEPHONE (include Area Code) (408) 927-2426	22c OFFICE SYMBOL

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Contract N00014-84-C-0708

R&T Code 4131022

Technical Report No. 29

**Comment on "Single Pentacene Molecules Detected by Fluorescence
Excitation in a p-Terphenyl Crystal"**

by

W. E. Moerner and W. P. Ambrose

Prepared for Publication

in

Physical Review Letters

IBM Research Division
Almaden Research Center
650 Harry Road
San Jose, California 95120-6099

December 10, 1990

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RJ 7875 (72535) 12/10/90
Solid State Physics

**COMMENT ON "SINGLE PENTACENE MOLECULES DETECTED BY FLUORESCENCE
EXCITATION IN A *P*-TERPHENYL CRYSTAL"**

W. E. Moerner
W. P. Ambrose

IBM Research Division
Almaden Research Center
650 Harry Road
San Jose, California 95120-6099

ABSTRACT: Using highly efficient fluorescence excitation spectroscopy of individual pentacene molecular impurities in *p*-terphenyl crystals, we have observed that some pentacene defects exhibit spontaneous spectral jumps in their resonance frequency at 1.5 K, with a jump rate independent of laser power. In addition, the low-power limiting linewidth for single pentacene absorbers reaches the lifetime limit of 7.8 MHz at 1.5K.

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Comment on "Single Pentacene Molecules Detected by Fluorescence Excitation in a p-Terphenyl Crystal"

W. E. Moerner and W. P. Ambrose

IBM Research Division, Almaden Research Center

K95/801, 650 Harry Road, San Jose, CA, USA 95120-6099

In a recent Letter, Orrit¹ et al. show the fascinating result that the use of fluorescence excitation for single molecule detection (SMD) and spectroscopy in solids can yield excellent signal-to-noise ratio, thus confirming earlier SMD using absorption techniques.² We obtain similar results using fluorescence excitation, and wish to comment on two points.³

Orrit et al. find anomalously large line widths of 10-15 MHz for single pentacene molecules at 25 mW/cm². We find similar widths at similar intensities; however, at lower intensity (1.8 mW/cm²) the lifetime-limited width⁴ of 7.8 ± 0.2 MHz is reached (Fig. 1). We find a measured saturation intensity I_s of 7 ± 3 mW/cm² which is an order of magnitude below the three-level I_s calculated from known photophysical parameters⁴. Apparently, while the power-broadening characteristic of single pentacenes is modified, the excited state lifetime is not.

Orrit et al. observe sudden drops and surges in some emission peaks which are interpreted as photo-induced spectral hole-burning of single molecules.¹ While photo-induced changes may occur, we find that two distinct classes of molecules are present: class I, which are stable in time, and class II, which show spontaneous, discontinuous jumps in resonance frequency of 20-60 MHz on a 1-420 s time scale. The occurrence of class II defects is quite common in the wings of the inhomogeneous line (increasing to 40 % at +0.23 nm from line

center), but only class I defects have been observed in a spectral region from 0.003 to 0.01 nm from line center. Fig. 2 shows that for fixed laser frequency, the fluorescence of a class II defect turns on and off in a stochastic fashion as the molecule jumps into and out of resonance. Moreover, the jump rate changes little with laser power (Fig. 2 a,b). We find no evidence that the jumping transitions are laser-driven; the dominant effect appears to be spectral diffusion of class II molecules perhaps because they are coupled to an (unidentified at present) ensemble of two-level systems in the host undergoing phonon-assisted tunneling.

This work was supported in part by the U. S. Office of Naval Research.

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FIGURE CAPTIONS

Figure 1. Fluorescence excitation spectrum for a single pentacene molecule in a sublimed crystal of p-terphenyl at 1.5 K. 0 MHz \equiv 592.407 nm, far into the wings of the 0_i site inhomogeneous line. The solid line is a Lorentzian fit.

Figure 2. Spectral jumps in the resonance frequency of a class II single defect detected with a fixed frequency laser at 592.362 nm. (a) 0.9 nW, (b) 36 nW.

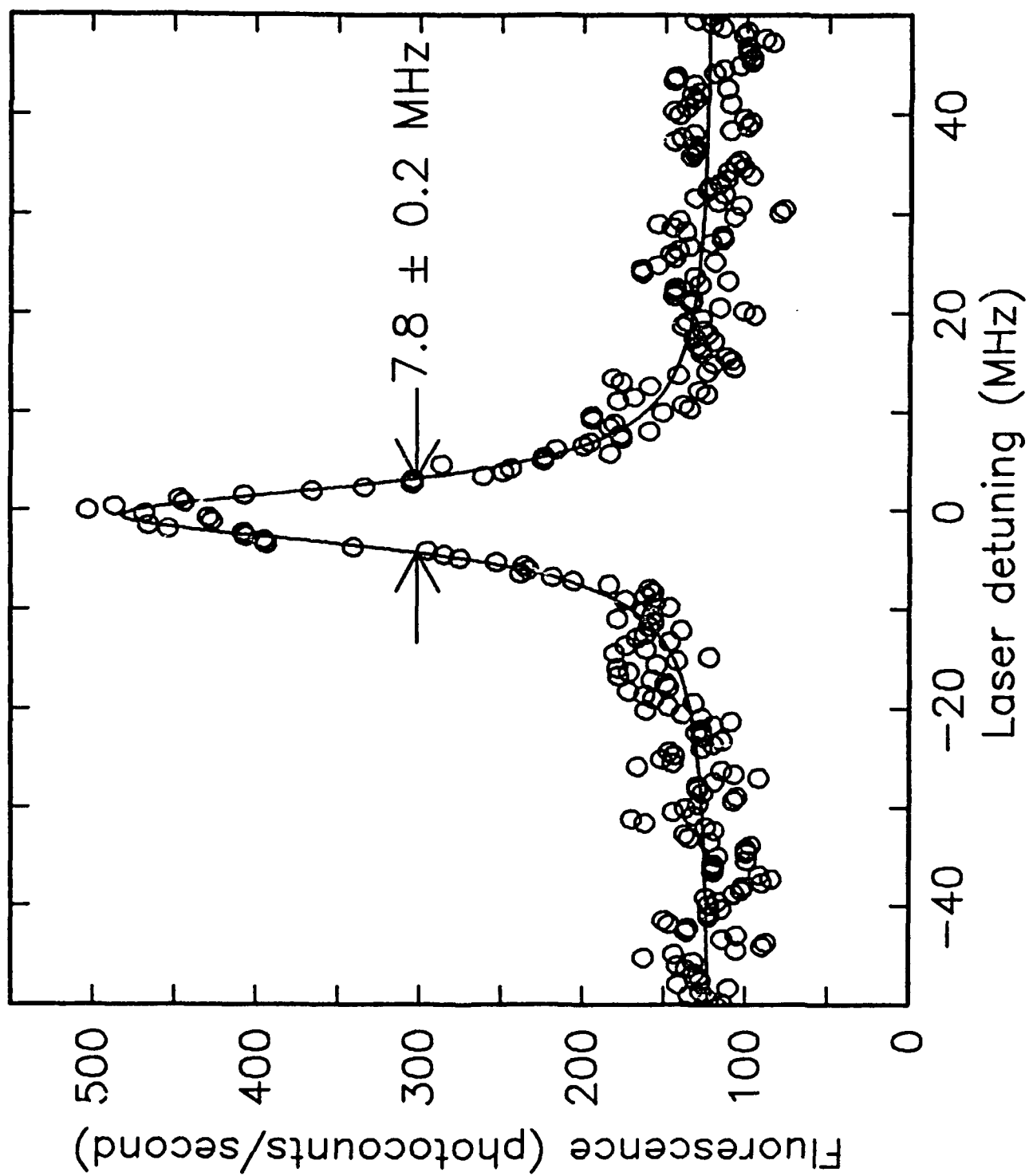


FIGURE 1

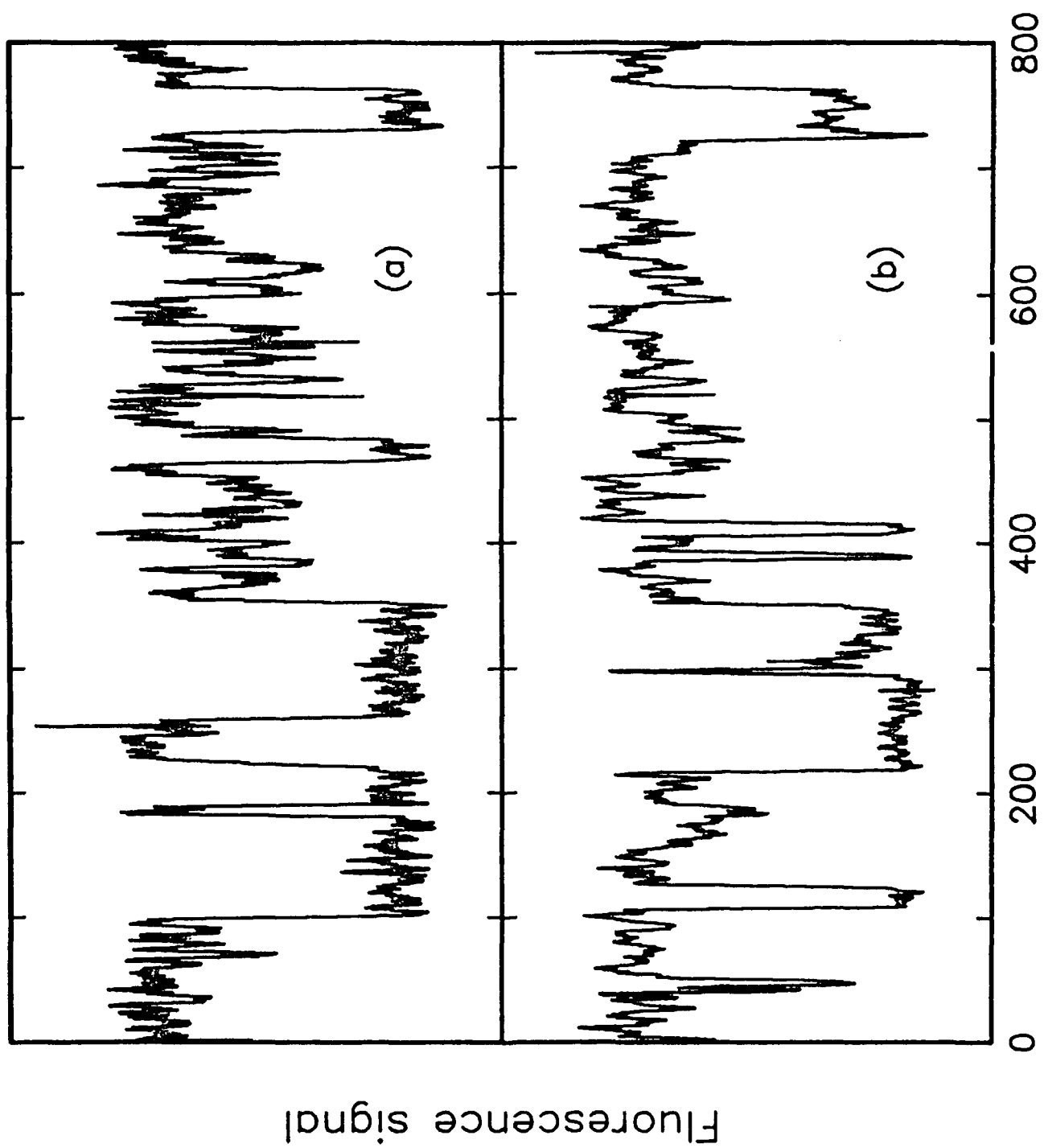


FIGURE 2

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